Last mile community economies: Taking back technology through platform co-operativism

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Platform co-operativism is emerging as a viable response to the challenges advanced by the gig economy, which proposes a model based on self-entrepreneurialism, exploitative automation, and the extraction and accumulation of data through digital interactions. In contrast, the platform co-operative movement envisions alternative digital futures rooted in the co-design and collective governance of technologies. This article looks at the platform co-operative movement through the lens of the diverse and community economies framework, drawing on comparative research in Bologna (Italy) and Barcelona (Spain). The article argues that this emerging movement proposes tangible practices to take back technology and to reshape the dominant narrative around digital labour. In this reimagined model, digital technologies are not tools for exploitation, but instruments that can enhance both service provision and workers' wellbeing. By exploring the transformation of the co-operative movement in digitally mediated cities, this article contributes to an ontology of economic difference and opens up to new imaginaries for alternative digital futures. The analysis is grounded in sixteen months of ethnographic research, employing qualitative methods to examine the everyday practices of two platform co-operatives.

Introduction

The platform co-operative movement is paving the way for a genuine form of resistance by experimenting with digital technologies in both physical and digital spaces. This emerging movement combines traditional co-operative values with the use of digital technologies, positioning itself in direct opposition to the exploitative logics of the platform economy that have taken shape over the past fifteen years. Mainstream digital platforms have co-opted the idea of a sharing economy: by presenting themselves as intermediaries in service exchanges between peers, they hide the technological mechanisms underpinning their operations, such as algorithmic management and data extraction. Digital platforms engaged in labour relations, central to the so-called gig economy, have received considerable attention from critical urban and labour scholars, who have exposed the disruptive effects of this rapidly evolving sector and how it disguises exploitation through the language of autonomy and entrepreneurship.

In response to this well-documented unco-operative background, the platform co-operative movement has gradually emerged, offering tangible alternatives for those seeking to design, develop, and implement non-extractive and non-exploitative digital technologies. Scholz (2016) was among the first to theorise this movement, describing it as "democratic ownership models for the Internet" that aim to bring "fairness to work on labor platforms" (p. 2). Platform co-operatives are shaped by the cultural and political contexts in which they emerge, reinforcing their embeddedness in local economies. In stark contrast to the dominant gig economy giants, these co-operatives are place-based and rooted in their communities (Grohmann, 2023). While making use of digital technologies, they prioritise the wellbeing of workers and the quality of the services they provide. As the next section clarifies, the co-operative tradition has played a key role in shaping the economic and cultural landscapes of several European regions, particularly the two considered in this study. In both Emilia-Romagna (Italy) and Catalonia (Spain), co-operative enterprises have been pivotal to local economic development since the late nineteenth century and continue to play a significant role today.

As a contemporary evolution of the co-operative tradition, platform co-operatives stand as a key alternative to the gig economy. Against this backdrop, this article conducts a comparative analysis of two platform co-operatives through the lens of the diverse and community economies (DCE) framework (Gibson-Graham, 2008). As discussed in the following section, this framework provides an ontology of situated, everyday economic practices that are not capitalist in nature and exist in relation to, or in opposition to, capitalist logics. In this regard, co-operatives offer concrete examples of how enterprises can be rethought and decentralised to generate community wealth rather than profit. However, as the DCE framework has not yet fully addressed digital technologies, this study also draws on feminist digital geographies, which offer alternative imaginaries to platform urbanism, namely the growing incorporation of digital technologies into urban life.

This comparative study explores co-operative practices across physical and digital spaces to assess whether platform co-operatives represent an emergent form of community economy in urban contexts. First, this work contributes to an ontology of the economic difference (Gibson-Graham, 2008) by examining how co-operatives experience and reconfigure both enterprise and community wellbeing. Second, it sheds light on novel practices of platform urbanism. While existing literature (e.g., Srnicek, 2016) has offered substantial insights into how platform capitalism is reshaping cities, labour, and consumption, less is known about alternative models.

In the face of increasing digitalisation of urban spaces, it is urgent to move beyond capitalocentric perspectives and foreground diverse and non-capitalist activities. Learning from two remarkable cases, in Bologna (Italy) and Barcelona (Spain), this study opens up to new discussions and ethical vocabularies in digitally mediated cities. In line with Scholz's (2016) early theorisation, the DCE framework focuses on labour and explores practices that allow workers to sustain themselves under fair conditions. As this study illustrates, platform co-operatives leverage digital technologies to support co-operative organisation and ensure workers' wellbeing. In doing so, they combine the DCE framework with new forms of collective engagement via digital platforms. Therefore, I argue that these co-operatives take back technology as a tool for community empowerment by incorporating new work habits mediated by digital technologies. In this context, taking back technology means shifting the dominant narrative of exploitation to one of co-operation, with and through digital platforms.

This contribution is based on the experience of two platform co-operatives: a taxi co-operative in Bologna and a cycling logistics co-operative in Barcelona. Both operate in the urban mobility sector and are therefore conceptualised as last-mile community economies, as the third section clarifies. The article is structured as follows. The next section introduces the DCE framework and the rise of the platform co-operative movement, along with contextual information about the cases and the methodology. The third section presents the empirical findings, structured into three subsections, each offering insights into the two platform co-operatives examined. The last section summarises the work and suggests new directions that need further investigation.

Knitting the Diverse and Community Economies Framework and Platform Urbanism Together

The DCE framework has sparked a novel line of inquiry within critical economic geographies. In the late 1990s, Gibson-Graham, drawing on poststructuralist theories, developed a performative ontology that challenges fixed economic concepts such as economic growth and institutional metrics; measures that often reinforce uneven geographies of development (Gibson-Graham, 2000, 2014). Indeed, they argued that mainstream economic paradigms fail to capture community-based practices such as co-operative enterprises, collective ownership, and community gardens. In line with other feminist scholars (e.g. Lawson, 1995), this epistemological approach rejects the idea of an objective, universal economic science and instead offers "a workable economic vocabulary" grounded in situated, everyday action and guided by a commitment to "thick description" (Gibson-Graham, 2014, p. 149). The Community Economies Research Network (CERN) has advanced this agenda over the past thirty years by exploring interstitial economic practices that offer alternative ways of organising economic relationships.

A key publication in this sense is the handbook *Take Back the Economy: An Ethical Guide for Transforming Our Communities* (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013), which outlines five core areas for rethinking the economy: work, business, market, property, and finance. To a large extent, the book emphasises co-operative enterprises as key models for community-led economic transformation. In the introduction, the authors articulate their vision of economic ethics as:

- *Surviving* together well and equitably;

- *Distributing surplus* to enrich social and environmental health;

- *Encountering others* in ways that support their wellbeing as well as ours;

- Consuming sustainably;

- *Caring for* — maintaining, replenishing, and growing — our natural and cultural commons,

- *Investing our wealth in future generations* so that they can live well.

<div align="right">(Gibson-Graham et al., 2013, pp. xviii–xix, italics in the original)</div>

The DCE framework offers both theoretical and practical insights into how economic life can foster community wealth. This article contributes to this body of work by exploring an area that deserves more attention: the role of community economies in shaping the adoption and use of digital platforms in urban spaces. Platform urbanism is a live issue in Europe and calls for an examination of what lies beyond platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2016). This interest stems from the recent digital turn in geography, which invites us to explore "geographies through, produced by, and of the digital" (Ash et al., 2018, p. 35). To examine whether platform co-operativism can be conceptualised as a community economy and to identify the practices enabled by digital technologies, this study facilitates a dialogue with feminist digital geographies (Elwood & Leszczynski, 2018).

Building on the same epistemological stance, feminist scholars have critically examined technological innovation through relational socio-spatial ontologies (Elwood & Leszczynski, 2018; see also D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020; Haraway, 1999). This study contributes to that conversation by theorising co-operative digital practices through the notion of the glitch, understood as "an additional register beyond the immediacy of failure or malfunction" (Leszczynski, 2020, p. 196) of the digital. Echoing the DCE's emphasis on everyday situated practice, a "glitchy minor theory" allows us to move beyond the "totalising analytics of masculinist critiques … of platform enterprises" (p. 202). In the cases studied here, the glitch emerges through experimentation and learning processes, involving entrepreneurial decision-

making and digital tool use. By understanding platform co-operatives as socio-technical assemblages, this study highlights the spatialities and temporalities that favour this form of technological and economic reinvention (Rose, 2017). These co-operatives not only seek to reclaim economic life through everyday economic practices but also repurpose digital technologies to support collective work, co-operative life, and workers' wellbeing, while actively challenging dominant platform logics.

The platform co-operative movement first emerged in urban contexts as a response to the exploitative dynamics of gig work. Scholz (2016) conceptualised platform co-operativism to highlight an emerging movement that seeks to take back platformed works and promote democratic ownership of the internet and its digital infrastructures . Scholz also founded The Platform Co-operatives Consortium (PCC), which in 2025 includes a directory of projects in over fifty countries (PCC, n.d.). The PCC fosters dialogue between academia and policymakers at multiple scales. In recent years, scholarly engagement with platform co-operativism expanded, recognising it as a heterogeneous movement shaped by specific technological and economic conditions. However, a defining characteristic of this young movement is its commitment to developing and adopting digital platforms that incorporate horizontal governance structures, respect user privacy, and facilitate community participation (Fuster Morell et al., 2021).

In urban spaces, the gig economy first became visible through riders' backpacks; only more recently, platforms-branded cars appeared on European streets. This silent market penetration was often followed by public trials and political scandals, such as the Glovo and Uber leaks (see, for example, Brave New Europe, 2023; Cordero, 2025). This covered-up strategy reflects the functioning of the digital platform. As critical scholarship has revealed, these platforms rely on exploitative mechanisms including algorithmic management, performance ranking, the illusion of self-employment, and intensive data extraction (Bunders et al., 2022). These techniques blur the boundaries between wage labour and self-entrepreneurship: on the one hand, workers are tightly controlled by opaque algorithms that track, evaluate, and reward performance; on the other hand, they must supply with their own equipment and maintain full availability or risk penalties (Armano et al., 2023; Chicchi & Marrone, 2023). On top of labour challenges, digital platforms also engage in data-driven accumulation by dispossession (van Doorn & Badger, 2020). Such critiques serve as a starting point to create an ontology of the economic difference. In contrast to the exploitative and extractive logics of capitalist platforms, platform co-operatives offer a pathway for a technological reinvention that prioritises community wellbeing. In this light, co-operative digital practices represent a novel area of action that extends beyond traditional co-operative economies.

Another key feature of this movement is the crucial role played by institutional support (Grohmann, 2023), particularly evident in the cases examined in this study. Situated in the European South (Rossi, 2022), these examples highlight how platform co-operativism is embedded in specific technological, cultural, and economic contexts. The co-operative tradition has strong historical roots in Europe (Utting, 2016), especially in the regions considered here. In Emilia-Romagna and Catalonia, as well as in their two major centres, Bologna and Barcelona, co-operative enterprises emerged as early as the late nineteenth century in agriculture and manufacturing (Amin, 2004; Dalmau Torvà & Miró i Acedo, 2010). Today, co-operative enterprises constitute a significant part of alternative economies. The Catalan Economia Social i Solidaria (ESS) generates more than 8% of the local gross domestic product and is home to over 19% of Spain's co-operatives (Fundació Espriu, 2025), and Legacoop, the Emilia-Romagna co-operative network, which covers 17.9% of the regional gross domestic product (GDP) (Legacoop Emilia-Romagna, n.d.).

While co-operatives present a concrete alternative to capitalist platform models, they are not without contradictions. This work does not aim to romanticise platform co-operativism as a frictionless or universally inclusive model. As hinted above, these co-operatives operate in dialogue with the capitalist system, and they advance more ethical actions. This process leads to continuous challenges that should not be omitted (Gibson-Graham, 2003). A growing body of literature has critically examined the tensions within co-operative economies. For instance, the

reliance on volunteer labour (Borzaga et al., 2019) may pose barriers to participation for some. Other scholars have interrogated notions like "entrepreneurial activism" (Sandoval, 2020), which suggests that small and young co-operatives may not necessarily be more inclusive than their capitalist counterparts. Instead, they may favour participation from specific groups of workers/ activists who have the resources, hence the privileges, to engage in such projects. While a full exploration of these tensions exceeds the scope of this article, it is important to keep them in mind when discussing the ontology of economic difference. Some of these contradictions are taken up in the conclusion as areas for future research.

Informed by the principle of thick description and the epistemological stance outlined above, this study is based on sixteen months of ethnographic research in Bologna and Barcelona. From April to October 2023, I interviewed eight members of a taxi co-operative in Bologna and the electronic engineer who supports the co-operative's technological life. I also conducted archival research on the co-operative's internal publications, which reveal a lively cultural and community life. In addition, I carried out observations with the dispatchers managing radio taxi operations and the digital platform in the co-operative headquarters. Between January and October 2024, in Barcelona, I engaged in active participation within an urban cycling logistics co-operative, where I conducted autoethnographic research by volunteering as a bike courier and directly interacting with the city's last-mile logistics (LML) operations and the co-operative's digital platform. I also interviewed eight enterprises awarding the LML service to the co-operative; to explore their functioning, I conducted field visits to their logistics hubs around Catalonia with three of them. Finally, I attended the general assembly of the European Federation, of which the Catalan co-operative is a member, in the province of Liège (Belgium) in July 2024. The different modalities of engagement reflect the specificities of the services each co-operative provides: while I could not drive a taxi in Bologna, participating in bicycle deliveries in Barcelona proved feasible.

Co-operative Practices in the Digitally Mediated City

The previous section outlined the Catalan co-operative's role in covering the LML sector in Barcelona, that is, the final urban segment of logistical chains. However, this work aims to conceptualise both co-operatives as last-mile community economies, an idea that emerged during an interview with the president of the taxi co-operative in Bologna. While explaining how the taxi service operates in the public transport system, he stated:

> … we are a small part of the public transport system, integrated with other mobility systems. Where there is a mass transit system, there is usually a need for an alternative solution to cover the last mile, and we are the most qualified actors to provide it. (Interview transcript, 11/04/2023, Bologna)

While the cycling LML co-operative covers the shortest segment of a delivery route, the taxi service facilitates the farthest mile in an integrated transport system. Despite their differing spatial logics, both co-operatives are embedded in extended, interconnected mobility networks. Covering the last mile implies constant movement, operating in a space with no fixed boundaries where the service might naturally stop. As such, these co-operatives operate in the field, experiencing the everyday life of cities and their platformisation.

This section first introduces the two co-operatives and then examines their practices in three parts. The first two draw on chapters from *Take Back the Economy* (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013) to frame these experiences as community economies. The third explores how the co-operatives take back technology through everyday experimentation and engagement.

The Cooperativa Tassisti Bolognesi — COTABO was founded in 1967 in Bologna (Italy), and it is currently the city's largest taxi co-operative, with over five hundred members. It is a multiservice co-operative whose members are taxi drivers, legally recognised as self-employed. In Italy, the taxi system is a public service regulated by municipalities, which set tariffs and limit the number of licenses according to mobility needs. Over its more than sixty years of activity,

COTABO transitioned towards platform co-operativism by developing an in-house digital platform, which facilitates the management of thousands of rides per month. Eccher and Rossi (2025) explored this technological trajectory as a path towards technological self-determination. COTABO is widely recognised as a pioneer within both Legacoop and the PCC, particularly for its level of technological innovation and remarkable history of digital transition (Silvestro, 2018).

Mensakas, by contrast, is a cycling logistics co-operative based in Barcelona, founded in 2018 by a group of riders affiliated with the pioneering labour collective Riders X Derechos (Soto Aliaga, 2023). After being deactivated by the digital platform Deliveroo for refusing exploitative labour conditions, they turned to the co-operative model as a way to continue working as couriers. Today, Mensakas consists of approximately 20 members, many of whom are deeply politicised (Guichoux, 2024a). Given its strong ties to labour struggle, Mensakas was the first platform co-operative within Barcelona's ESS and has greatly benefited from institutional support while developing dynamic collaborations with other co-operatives engaged in cycling and cycling logistics (Cañada et al., 2023; Guichoux, 2024b). In this sense, multiscalar inter-co-operation is a key feature of Mensakas' activity: at the Catalan level, it is part of Som Ecologístika, a co-operative network organising sustainable logistics in the region, while at the European level, it is a member of CoopCycle, a French-based federation that provides an open-source digital platform for worker-owned delivery co-operatives. Initially, Mensakas attempted to develop its internal digital platform, but joined CoopCycle due to technical and financial limitations. CoopCycle now represents a concrete response to the Uberisation of work and offers an alternative model to platform capitalism (Fortuny-Sicart et al., 2024). Currently, the Federation includes around forty projects across Europe and is working to scale up to Latin America (Kasparian, 2022).

In discussing digital technologies and platforms used by these co-operatives, this article refers primarily to the dispatching system (COTABO's in-house digital platform, and CoopCycle in the case of Mensakas) and the Telegram chat groups adopted by both co-operatives for internal communication.

Resignifying the economy, resignifying the streets. The city is my office!

> … what we wear is an important aspect of our identity. Our clothes shape how we feel about ourselves and how we are treated by others. (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013, p. 5)

For workers whose jobs require constant mobility across the city, being recognisable in the streets is crucial. A telling example is the No. 02/1988 of *Il Socio*, an internal magazine edited by the co-operative until 2015, entirely dedicated to the forthcoming balloting on the taxis' colour. The issue collects perspectives from drivers, clients, the mayor, and union representatives, all reflecting on how colour affects taxis' public visibility, and even economic aspects such as colouring or resale value. The debate disentangles the different features of this change, which is key in the everyday co-operative's life.

In a similar vein, during an interview with a roasting enterprise working with Mensakas, a worker recounted how they first encountered the co-operative:

> I didn't know about Mensakas, but when we were here in a meeting discussing possible options, J. one day saw a guy from Mensakas, yes, he saw a guy from Mensakas with a bunch of boxes … (Interview transcript, 03/10/2024)

In this case, Mensakas was contracted precisely because its riders were visibly present in the streets, allowing potential clients to recognise them as a delivery service. Notably, Mensakas is the only urban cycling enterprise in Barcelona where couriers wear a distinctive uniform — a purple jacket — helping to establish their brand and legitimacy in public space. This visibility is not just practical: it also fosters a sense of belonging, as I experienced firsthand while cycling with a cargo bike through car traffic due to the absence of a bike lane.

Being visible, then, means being present, and being recognisable while traversing the city is a defining feature of these co-operatives. Through their visibility, they occupy urban space

in contrast to the concealed strategies of gig economy platforms, opening up alternative imaginaries rooted in co-operation and solidarity. In the spatially fragmented field of the last mile, co-operative members engage in visibility as a day-to-day practice. Embodying their co-operative identity has practical consequences, such as gaining new contracts with clients, as well as symbolic ones, reinforcing their sense of legitimacy in the public spaces they navigate.

Take back work: Surviving well in the digitally mediated city

> But work can also be a drudge. It can be repetitive, physically demanding, unsafe, isolated, and so low-paid that it barely covers living costs. It can take over people's lives. (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013, p. 17)

During my time volunteering as a bike courier for Mensakas, I filled my fieldwork diary with the emotion of fatigue. When the city is your office, you are in constant movement, exposed to the unpredictability of urban spaces. Whether sitting in a taxi or cycling through traffic, it requires constant attention to save your and others' lives while drawing the service to a close. Unlike corporate digital platforms, which disregard workers' safety even in the event of fatal accidents (Diez Prat et al., 2024), these co-operatives actively care for their members. It may seem straightforward to frame co-operative practices in opposition to those of their counterparts. While the latter rely on automation, self-entrepreneurialism, and isolation, co-operativism operates on the principle of one member, one vote, reinforcing a collective responsibility for the success of the organisation. This structure promotes a fairer distribution of labour, income, surplus, and decision-making power, helping to ensure that no worker faces exploitative conditions. In both co-operatives, the surplus is reinvested in the co-operative, following the long-standing co-operative tradition and placing ethical thinking at the heart of this entrepreneurial model.

Gibson-Graham et al.'s (2013) chapter 'Take Back Work' (pp. 17-48) outlines five interrelated dimensions that support the idea of "surviving well". While mapping co-operative practices neatly onto these dimensions proves difficult, numerous examples illustrate how they contribute to workers' wellbeing. Social wellbeing is fostered through informal practices, such as the casual gatherings that take place after bike maintenance sessions. In the same vein, COTABO takes part each year in the 2 August commemoration in Bologna, honouring the victims of the fascist bombing at the train station, including two taxi drivers who lost their lives. Material wellbeing is fostered through democratic decision-making processes regarding income distribution and co-operative changes. During general assemblies, members discuss and express their vote on the budget, the board of directors, shared resources, and structural improvements. As a worker co-operative, Mensakas owns its delivery equipment, such as e-cargo bikes, which are central to the work. General information about bike maintenance is shared during meetings, reflecting the co-operative's broader ethos of caring for its tools, and by extension, for its members' bodies, which are their most essential resource. Interestingly, physical wellbeing also emerges in connection with planetary wellbeing. Riders and drivers directly experience the effects of traffic congestion and pollution in their daily work, strengthening their commitment to low-emission vehicles and greener cities. Finally, community wellbeing is favoured by the everyday interactions and learning that the co-operative structure encourages. Learning is mutual and embedded in collective activities, such as the bike mechanics workshop mentioned earlier, or the English classes organised by COTABO for its drivers in 1990. Through continuous processes of learning-by-doing, members develop and share practical knowledge, contributing to an ongoing experiment in co-operative entrepreneurship.

Take back technology: Working with(out) algorithms

"Well, the experimental is trial and error, it's our laboratory" (transcript of the Telegram chat with a Mensakas' member, 24/04/2024). Operating in the digitally mediated city means constant experimentation to face groundbreaking challenges. Trial and error is the everyday practice through which platform co-operatives enact their own technological reinvention, practising a sociotechnical assemblage that repurposes digital tools to serve collective needs. This process may be messy, but it is also an ongoing form of learning. In this context, digital technologies

are not imposed for purposes of control or surveillance; rather, they are appropriated as tools to support wellbeing and sustainable work practices. This sociotechnical assemblage evolves from lived experience, since the digital platforms are improved through continuous feedback. For instance, CoopCycle regularly tests software updates through selected co-operatives, which provide feedback before modifications are adopted across the network. In this case, the Federation's online assembly serves as a space where proposed changes are discussed, revised, and collectively approved. Updates are first tested by volunteering co-operatives, then presented in the assembly, and finally implemented across the wider network. At COTABO, technological progress is also publicly celebrated. One Facebook post, for instance, highlights the milestone of eight hundred thousand downloads of its client app, a testament to its successful innovation strategy (COTABO Radiotaxi Bologna, 2025).

Beyond co-design, working with technology also means engaging in ongoing maintenance, adaptation, and human presence. These co-operatives do not consider digital platforms as self-sufficient systems, but as tools that require human oversight. A key figure in this sense is the dispatcher: a human presence at the other side of the digital interface, responsible for adjusting operations in real-time and ensuring seamless coordination among workers. Dispatchers manage digital glitches (such as incorrect geolocations) and intervene when automated operations fall short. They also act as a direct communication link between workers, notifying them of changes in traffic conditions or service adjustments. During my observations with the dispatchers in both co-operatives, I noted their ongoing engagement in monitoring and supporting workers, particularly in critical situations.

One taxi driver, for instance, described an incident in which a dispatcher noticed something unusual during a night ride:

> The dispatcher, while speaking with the customer, realised that something was off, that they weren't completely fine. Her concern to keep me monitored until I reached my destination was notable. When they noticed that I had been stationary for five minutes in the same spot and wasn't moving, they called me to check if everything was okay … Technology doesn't catch these things … we can't automate everything because we, in the field, along with the dispatch centre and the people, still make a big difference. (Interview transcript, 23/10/2023)

This testimony underscores the irreplaceable role of human oversight in ensuring both workers' and passengers' safety. The dispatching system at COTABO employs an algorithm, an automation that enables the co-operative to manage thousands of rides per month, and that represents a milestone in COTABO's technological innovative path. However, this system is always accompanied by human dispatchers who work around the clock, offering support that goes far beyond what automation can provide (Eccher & Rossi, 2025).

By contrast, CoopCycle's dispatching system is entirely manual. Thus, dispatchers can deliberately select couriers for each order, considering factors such as physical ability, location, and bike availability, when they prepare the shifts. Since Mensakas handles a smaller volume of deliveries, this personalised coordination is feasible and effective. If problems arise, members themselves organise support via digital platforms to handle the unexpected.

In stark contrast to their capitalist counterparts, where algorithms prioritise profit over worker safety, platform co-operatives take back technology as a worker-centred tool. Even when automation is involved, human presence remains central. These co-operatives are not defined by their use of technology, but by how they repurpose it to reduce precarity, foster solidarity, and enhance collective wellbeing. Technology here becomes a means for "surviving well", aligned with the values of co-operation, mutual aid, and community care.

Conclusion

The platform co-operative movement is emerging as a viable alternative to the extractive logics that dominate the platform economy. By reinventing co-operative practices within digitally mediated cities, platform co-operatives seek to build community wealth across both physical

and digital spaces. Examining these community-led enterprises from an economic geographical perspective helps us to shed light on the everyday engagements in creating an alternative enterprise, and to understand the platform economy not as a singular, monolithic model but as a contested terrain marked by multiple ontologies. Consistent with existing literature, this study highlights the situated nature of platform co-operativism: local political, cultural, and economic conditions shape its practices and possibilities of survival.

This article has framed platform co-operatives as part of a longer lineage of community economies, where ethical economic practices are not only imagined but enacted. Their organisational forms, embeddedness in local urban contexts, and shared identification with cities reflect a continuation of long-standing traditions of centring collective wellbeing in democratic participation. At the same time, these initiatives offer new ways of thinking ethically about digital technologies. By working with co-designed, collectively governed platforms, they challenge the dominant narrative of digital labour exploitation and advance alternative imaginaries where technology is mobilised for care, equity, and sustainability. Importantly, these technologies are not neutral tools, but socio-technical assemblages embedded in communities. Co-operatives' platforms are shaped and adapted through everyday use by members, with design and functionality iteratively improved to meet the lived needs of workers. This reinforces a key idea: technology is spatial and relational; it can be adapted to support community-based organisation and workers' wellbeing. In this way, platform co-operatives contribute to a broader conversation about rethinking the digital economy through the lens of community economies in urban space.

As sketched out in the theoretical section, this article approaches platform co-operativism from a critical, intersectional standpoint. The aim is not to romanticise it. While representing a meaningful alternative, it is also marked by structural and internal contradictions. First, its legal and institutional frameworks often limit participation to individuals with regularised legal status, thereby excluding undocumented workers. Second, like any social organisation, co-operatives are not free from power dynamics and conflicts, both in the physical and digital spaces. Rather than ignoring these tensions, it is crucial to attend to how they are collectively navigated and negotiated.

Finally, platform co-operativism must be situated within broader debates about technological justice. Feminist scholarship reminds us that digital technologies are never neutral: they carry multiscalar implications, from resource extraction for hardware production to the environmental costs of data storage. Taking back technology, then, might not only mean creating worker-owned digital platforms; in the future, we will need a further understanding able to ensure that technologies are inclusive, accessible, and free from structural biases.

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